

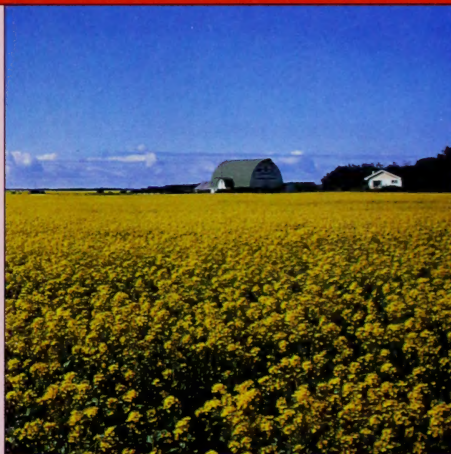
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# Alberta NORTH



- Two Adventurers
- The Famous Athabasca Trail
- People of the North
- Collecting Memories



Vol. 4, No. 1

Winter, 1991



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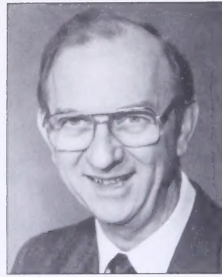
Dear Readers:

As I have mentioned in the past, *Alberta North* appreciates hearing from readers. But one thing amazes us. Although this mini-magazine is distributed to schools, it apparently finds its way into historical societies' hands as well. And that's all for the best. Some of our best story ideas have come from members of historical societies.

Olive Stickney's name was sent to us by a resident of that community who wants to see the village's heritage preserved. In a future issue we expect to do a more detailed story about Olive.

If you have any story ideas, please share them with us.

We want to know about the interesting people of northern Alberta.



*Bob Elliot*

**Bob Elliot**, chairman  
Northern Alberta Development Council



Archives of Alberta, Photo Collection A.2550.

*Campers on the Athabasca Trail*

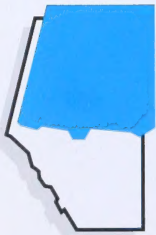
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NORTHERN ALBERTA  
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

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# The Man Who Did Things First: Peter Pond

Peter Pond was 67 when he died in Connecticut, U.S.A., where he had been born. It is surprising that he reached that age, because most voyageurs died young. Besides, he had a quarrelsome, risk-taking nature.

He was a founding partner of the North-West Company and, almost single-handedly, was responsible for establishing the fur trade in the Lake Athabasca-Fort Chipewyan region.

He would have had no trouble making it into the *Guinness Book of World Records* if there had been such a book at that time. He was the first white man to come to what is now Alberta; the first to see the oil sands; to cross the difficult Methy Portage; to grow a vegetable garden; and to build a white man's house here.

In fact, he built the first fort in all the Mackenzie watershed.

He was also the one who realized that pemmican was the ideal food for voyageurs to carry on their long canoe trips, and he drew the first maps (not very accurate ones) of northern Alberta.

You are probably wondering where he built that house and fort. Historians don't know, but they believe it likely was at Embarras Portage.

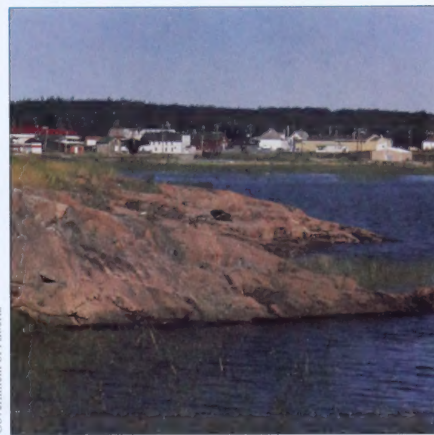
You can find Embarras Portage on the map. Look a little bit south and west of Fort Chipewyan.

Something else to look for is Peter Pond Lake. This lake, while not in Alberta, is located on the route he took through Saskatchewan to reach Alberta.

Peter Pond's great dream was to find the overland route to the Pacific Ocean, but he was a violent man who got himself mixed up in two murders, and the Company sent Alexander Mackenzie into the Athabasca Delta to oversee things.

Peter Pond left the following spring (1788), eventually returning to Connecticut where he died a poor man even though he had been largely responsible for bringing extraordinary riches out of the north and into the hands of the North-West Company.

Sadly, he never realized his dream either. Alexander Mackenzie, using Pond's maps, and building on Pond's



Government of Alberta

*Modern Fort Chipewyan where the land is still the same as it was in Peter Pond's day.*

vision, was the explorer who first travelled overland to the Western Sea.

You would think everybody would know about Peter Pond, but children in other provinces have never heard of him, and many Albertans have no idea who he was or what he did.

# Every Man's Friend: Twelve-Foot Davis

Twelve-Foot Davis was not 12 feet tall. In fact, he was quite a short man. He got his nickname because he staked a claim for a gold mine in a tiny 12-foot space between two other major claims. He made a fortune on the gold he found there. This all happened during the Cariboo Gold Rush in B.C.

Because he was the kind of man who shared whatever he had with needy people, he soon gave away most of the \$20,000 his mine earned for him—a fortune in the 1850s.

So Twelve-Foot, whose real name was Henry Fuller Davis, went back to his first work, trading. He became a well-known character in the Peace River Country. He traded goods upstream on the Fraser River, over the height of land, to the Parsnip River, then down the Peace to Dunvegan.

A popular man, he couldn't read or write. Nevertheless, he kept accurate records in his mind and treated everyone fairly.

In his own words: "I never killed nobody; never stole from nobody; I never hurt nobody intentional; and I always kept my shacks open for tired and hungry people."

He had not been born in Canada. Like Peter Pond, he came to northern Alberta from the U.S.A.

He died in Grouard on Lesser Slave Lake in 1893, according to his gravestone. Historians think that date is probably wrong. He most likely did not die until 1900 or 1901.

After he had been dead some 12 years, a friend moved his body from Grouard to Peace River because he had said he wanted to be buried there. He lies at the top of a hill overlooking the beautiful Peace River Valley.

This is what is written on his gravestone:

*H.F. Davis*

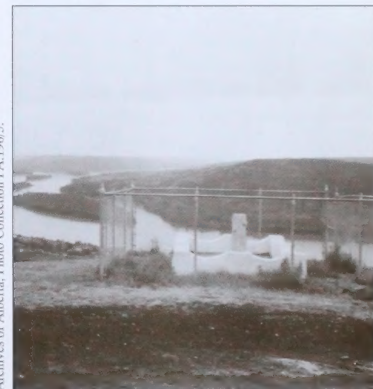
*Born in Vermont, 1820*

*Died at Slave Lake, 1893*

*Pathfinder, Pioneer, Miner and Trader*

*He was every man's Friend  
And Never Locked His Cabin Door.*

What a tribute! And what a wonderful friend and neighbor Twelve-Foot Davis must have been.



Archives of Alberta, Photo Collection PA.196/5.

*The grave of Twelve-Foot Davis overlooks the beautiful Peace River Valley.*



# The Famous Athabasca Landing Trail

In the days before the white man came, the Indians had a route that led from the North Saskatchewan River, through the site of today's town of Athabasca, to the Arctic Ocean. They used this trail for centuries.

Fur traders, when they came, followed the same path in the early 1800s. Then, in 1875, the Hudson's Bay Company chopped out a cart road from Fort Edmonton (just below the site of the Legislative Building in Edmonton) to Athabasca Landing.

This was Alberta's very first highway and it was pretty much the same route as the old Indian trail. It opened the way to the rivers that reached the western Arctic regions.

The Bay called its road, The Athabasca Landing Trail and had it surveyed in 1879.

Although The Bay expected to be the only ones to use the trail, this was not to be. The first settler came along it before it was even surveyed and this was only the beginning. Soon, explorers, other settlers, missionaries, adventurers and independent traders also began to use it.

But The Athabasca Landing Trail really came into its own when the Klondike Gold Rush brought 885 prospectors over it on their way to make fortunes in the Yukon.

It continued to see heavy use when the gold rush ended because in the early years of this century, settlers heading into the Peace River Country came by way of The Athabasca Trail.

It was not easy for them, for the journey from Edmonton to Athabasca Landing took from five to eight days with loaded wagons. Sometimes, if there had been a lot of recent rain, it could take even longer.

This was a distance of only 154.5 kilometres (96 miles). We could do it today in a couple of hours.

The historic Athabasca Landing Trail was used for more than 35 years.

In future issues of *Alberta North*, we will tell you about other trails that the early settlers and explorers travelled to reach our then-distant north.



A wagon gets bogged down on the Athabasca Trail.

## What the Trail was Like

You and I cannot imagine what The Athabasca Trail was like. We are used to wide paved or graded roads and comfortable vehicles.

The Athabasca Trail was not wide, and it was certainly not straight. It wound through trees and up and down hills, straight into swamps and muskeg, and sometimes right through rivers and streams.

After the Hudson's Bay Company defined this trail and chopped it into a road of sorts, they also erected some bridges and maintained boats and ferries. But, even so, this was no city street.

Many trees had been felled to improve the trail, but their stumps still lay in the path. If and when the road ever dried out, there were mud holes where wagons and animals got mired down, and these became ruts capable of tipping a wagon over.

Travellers also encountered deep sand traps. Some people said they travelled with one set of wheels in a rut and the other set out of it, in order to move at all.

Parts of the trail were corduroyed. This was a way of laying poles across the road and then caulking between them with clay, or mud, or sand.

Corduroying was supposed to prevent animals and wagons from sinking into mud or falling into holes. But sometimes, oxen or horses got their feet trapped between the poles. And sometimes the corduroy gave way.

All along The Athabasca Trail you could have found abandoned wagons and goods, and dead horses. The horses died from exhaustion or injury, and then the travellers could not move their wagons.

As for the settlers, they found the trail so difficult for their animals that most people ended up walking. Even small children, pregnant women, and old people walked that trail.

They said they were nearly driven out of their minds by mosquitoes and biting flies. They had to coat all exposed flesh with mud as a protection against the insects. They did the same for their animals.

How much they must have wanted to settle in our beautiful north to have endured the hardships of the trail; how often they must have been frightened and discouraged; and what stories they must later have told their children and grandchildren.

The Athabasca Trail was used until 1912 when the railway finally reached Athabasca Landing.





## Where Was This Trail?

Although many traces of the trail have vanished with time, some can still be found. It seems as if The Athabasca Trail took the following route:

From Edmonton northeast to the Sturgeon River, then along the river for some six miles to just northeast of Gibbons. It went around Lily Lake next, then along a creek past where Waugh is today till it crossed the Redwater River. It then ran a little east of present-day Clyde, up through Tawatinaw, Rochester, Perryvale, Meanook and Colinton. It ended at the town of Athabasca, called Athabasca Landing in those days.

The railway took a more direct route, but from about Tawatinaw on, the train tracks run alongside the historic old Athabasca Trail.

## What Happened to The Athabasca Landing Trail?

What happens to a trail when nobody needs it anymore?

In the case of The Athabasca Trail, those parts in and near Edmonton got paved over. In other places, weeds and brush grew back and covered it. Some of the trail became farmers' fields and crops grew across it.

Most people forgot it had ever existed although some stretches were very easy to spot.

In 1976, a group dedicated to seeing it was not lost forever, took a trail ride over the old road. This was so successful that they decided to preserve the trail and try to take annual trail rides.

The Athabasca Landing Trail was cleared of rubbish and overgrowth and the Trail North Foundation now tried to have the entire trail named a provincial historic resource.

This was not possible and the group settled for the restoration of an old



Building boats for the Gold Rush at Athabasca Landing in 1898.

Archives of Alberta, Photo Collection B-5684.

church and an official sign just north of Gibbons.

Although you cannot take a guided tour or ride over the trail, it is possible for adventurous people to follow it.

You can also visit Old St. Mary's Church at Waugh, now a museum.

## Who Travelled the Athabasca Trail?

We have a great deal of information about the people who travelled The Athabasca Landing Trail, for many of them kept journals which historians have studied; and some even wrote books and poems.

One interesting book is called, *Our Trail North*, by E. Van Kleeck. This story is about homesteaders journeying over The Athabasca Trail, then along the north side of Lesser Slave Lake, and finally south from Grouard to the High Prairie area. They did this in 1912, just before the arrival of the railway.

In 1910, a young woman named Edna Shore, travelled by horse and

wagon as far as Athabasca Landing on a holiday of sorts. Imagine! Her story was printed in the *Alberta Historical Review* in 1971.

We also know that Hudson's Bay traders, natives, and horsemen delivering the mail, used the trail. So did freight wagons loaded with goods for the settlers already at Athabasca Landing and with parts and equipment for the boatmen who plied the river.

Missionaries were another group you could find on The Athabasca Trail. You might want to read, *The Emperor of Peace River*, written by Eugenie Louise Myles, the daughter

of a woman who walked the trail with her missionary family when she was just a little girl in 1886.

Certainly, we must not forget the Klondikers. Called 'Stampeders,' they trekked into the north in droves—on foot, on horseback, in carts and wagons in 1897 and 1898.

In his book, *Klondike*, Pierre Berton points out that not everyone on the Athabasca was a nice person. He tells of embezzlers, thieves, and opportunists of every kind.

Yes. People from all walks of life and of all shades of honesty, travelled The Athabasca Landing Trail.



# Arabs in The North

Northern Alberta may seem to be an unlikely place to find settlers of Arabic origin. It is, after all, a long way from the Mediterranean Ocean and the Middle East. But there was a Syrian fur-buyer in the Lac La Biche area as long ago as 1896.

This man was Sine (Ali) Abougoush—sometimes called Hajar. He bought furs in the vicinity of Fort Chipewyan, then brought them downriver to sell in Lac La Biche.

Not long after, in 1908, a Lebanese name Abou Shaedi (Alec Hamilton) owned a trading post in Lac La Biche. The next Lebanese settlers came six years later—one to be a mink farmer, the other to homestead the land.

More and more Arabic people came to the area until Lac La Biche had, and still has, the largest population of Arabs per capita in all of Canada. What do such people do in Canada? They do everything. The first ones became farmers and businessmen or went into the construction trades, but today, you will find many in the professions as well.

In fact, these fine people have settled very comfortably into our cold northern clime and have gone on to contribute to northern Alberta in many ways.

By 1970, there were enough people of the Moslem faith to support a mosque (a Moslem house of worship). When it was built, it was only the second mosque in all of Alberta and, for many years, had the distinction of being the most northerly one in the world. Today, there is also a mosque in Fort McMurray.

The Arabic language is taught in Lac La Biche public schools as part of the general curriculum. As well, the town has a very active Canadian Moslem Association and Arabic lessons may be taken there.

At this time, there are between 300 and 350 Arab-Canadians in the Lac La Biche area.



*Chipewyan people preparing moosehide.*

Archives of Alberta, Photo collection Oh.935.

## The Chipewyan People

(The story of one of the northern Alberta nations.)

No history book can tell us when the first Chipewyan people came to northern Alberta, but white men first encountered them in 1689.

At that time, they lived and hunted the land between Great Slave Lake and Hudson Bay. Soon after, they began to go to Fort Churchill to trade. Then, they acquired guns which allowed them to extend their territory farther north by forcing the Inuit to move.

In Alberta today, you can find Chipewyans living in the Cold Lake and Janvier areas as well as at Fort McKay and Fort Chipewyan.

The Chipewyans were fierce warriors. It was not until the 1760s that they began to live peacefully with the Cree, and it was even later (well into the 1800s) that they finally stopped their wars with the Inuit.

After they came to terms with the Cree, they still controlled the lower Peace and Athabasca Rivers, Lake Athabasca and lands that extended eastward as far as Hudson Bay.

They were known as great hunters. Because caribou was their main food, they usually followed the caribou migrations. It is said they used to spear these animals from their canoes as the herds swam across the lakes and rivers. What a sight that would have been!

They also hunted moose, muskox, buffalo, deer, and water birds of all kinds. Of course they fished.

The Chipewyans did not live in large tribes. Rather, they travelled in families, except when they were fighting. This family system was more efficient for feeding themselves than large groups would have been.

They dressed in caribou skins, leaving the animal hair on the hides for winter wear. They wore belts, mittens and caps too, and these were made from deer heads. Over all this clothing, they wore robes fashioned from caribou skins sewed together.

They had pointed ends hanging from their tunics (or shirts). These were pieces of animal skin and this fashion was unique to the Chipewyans. In fact, it is how they got their name. The word 'Chipewyan' comes from the Cree word for 'pointed skins.'

There are about 2,500 Chipewyans in northern Alberta.



*A Chipewyan camp in 1885.*

Archives of Alberta, Photo collection Oh.935.



## When Willie Walked North

Willie was so excited, he could hardly stand it. Only one more day until he and his mother and father would start on their journey to Athabasca Landing.

Willie's father had been promised a good job working on a steamboat, and the whole family was going to move away from Edmonton and set up a new home in a new place. They had spent days loading their wagon and preparing themselves for the trip.

"We're going to sleep in a tent and cook our meals over a fire," he boasted to his friend Robert.

"You'll probably get lost," Robert said.

"My father knows the way," Willie said proudly.

It rained and rained and rained when Willie and his family walked The Athabasca Trail. The oxen could hardly budge the wagon because of the deep mud, so sometimes everybody had to help the animals, by pushing the wagon and pulling on the beasts' yokes.

The nights were the worst. Willie heard the wolves howling in the woods and he shivered in his bedroll. Other unknown animals crept as near the camp as they dared, and he saw their eyes gleaming red in the darkness. Crawling and flying things got up his sleeves and down his neck, and these insects bit. The bedding was always cold and damp.

Sometimes Willie wished they had stayed in Edmonton in their warm cozy house.

Other times, he didn't miss his old home because they had good times too. Another family travelling the trail had a boy his age, and the boy's father played the fiddle.

They used to sit around the fire after supper chores were done and sing till bedtime. They were always happy when Willie's family joined them.

Although the animals made Willie nervous at night, it was exciting for him in the daytime whenever he saw a deer or moose or bear. There were hundreds of colorful birds too, and wildflowers and butterflies.

Sometimes, when he looked up at the lacy canopy of trees above his head, and smelled the sweet clean air, and imagined the new life ahead of him, Willie was glad they had decided to travel The Athabasca Trail to a new and exciting life.

## The Athabasca Trail

*I have seen the gorge of Erie where the roaring waters run,  
I have crossed the inland ocean, lying golden in the sun,  
But the last and best and sweetest is the ride by hill and dale*

*With the packer and the pack horse on the Athabasca Trail!  
I'll dream again of fields of grain that stretch from sky to sky,*

*And the little prairie hamlets where the cars go rolling by,  
Wooden hamlets as I saw them—noble cities still to be,  
To girdle stately Canada with gems from sea to sea.  
Mother of mighty manhood, land of glamour and of hope,  
From the eastward seaswept islands to the sunny western slope,*

*Ever more my heart is with you, ever more till life shall fail  
I'll be out with pack and packer on the Athabasca trail.*

— by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

(Note: This poem is not about the Athabasca Landing Trail but could have been, it is so suitable.)



This photo, taken in 1909, shows an overturned wagon on the Athabasca Landing Trail

Archives of Alberta, Photo collection A.2531.

## Interesting Things About Interesting Things — A Trivia Quiz

1. How long was The Athabasca Landing Trail?
2. Who was the first non-native person to see the Athabasca Oil Sands?
3. What was the settlement that is now called Slave Lake originally named?
4. What are the names of the rivers at Fort McMurray?
5. Why was northern Alberta settled before southern Alberta?
6. What highway takes you to the Northwest Territories?
7. Where in northern Alberta does it start?
8. What endangered bird nests in Wood Buffalo National Park?
9. Where is Wood Buffalo National Park?
10. How do you get there?
11. What fur trading company did Peter Pond work with?
12. Was Peter Pond a Canadian?
13. Into what body of water does the Peace River empty?
14. What northern community is Alberta's geographical centre?
15. Was Twelve-Foot Davis really 12 feet tall?

### About This Page

This page — the inside back cover — of *Alberta North* is the readers' page.

We will be happy to print stories, poems, drawings, puzzles, photography, and so on, submitted by our readers. Just remember that what you submit must be original since there are laws that protect other people's work.

Submit your work along with your name, address, grade and school to: The Editor, *Alberta North*, The Northern Development Branch, 2nd Floor, Provincial Building, 9621 - 96 Avenue, Peace River, Alberta T8S 1T4.

The best submissions will be published and all others will be returned.



# Folklore is Everywhere You Look

True folklore is something passed on by word-of-mouth from one generation to the next. It is the story your grandmother told your mother.

Such stories are not usually found in books. However, in recent years, they are being collected and published so they can be saved.

Here is how folklorists collect the lore of the people:

1. Find someone with a story.
2. Put that person at ease.
3. Listen to the story and use a tape recorder to get the exact words of the storyteller.
4. Put the story into a category.

Some folklorists also compare the stories they collect with those found by others in different countries. Would you believe that some version of "Jack and the Beanstalk" has been found in every country studied?

Also, folklorists do not view stories as the only lore of the people. They collect songs, dances, children's rhymes (like skipping rhymes), superstitions and proverbs as well.

Some collectors are specialists. Helen Creighton, Canada's most famous folklorist, once published a book that contained only ghost stories. Others collect Indian tales. Some specialize in rid-

dles and jokes.

Collecting folklore is something you can do very cheaply. If you don't have a tape recorder, write things down in a special notebook.

Start with your mother and father. Interview them and ask about family stories. Find out what rhymes they recited when they were kids. Does your mother know an old lullaby that she didn't learn from the radio or find in a book?

Don't forget that very old people might have the best stories of all.

Collecting folklore is fun. Almost anyone can do it.

## Storytelling in the Village of Hythe

There is a real live folklorist in Hythe. Her name is Olive Stickney and she has collected more than 200 stories already. There is no sign she is about to stop.

Like many folklorists, Olive is also a storyteller. In this, she follows in the footsteps of the minstrels, troubadours and chroniclers of old.

In bygone days, before newspapers, magazines, radio, television and even the telephone, people learned their history and the news from wandering storytellers.

Olive Stickney doesn't wander, but she collects the stories of oldtimers in the Hythe area as well as those of the

travellers who stop at the Hythe Heritage and Historical Centre.

She said she has always been interested in history and in making sure the stories of the pioneers are not lost.

She first started collecting when she helped put together the Hythe history book. Since *Pioneer Roundup* was published, she has collected another 180 pioneer stories as well as 50 more found in the records of the school district.

If you stop at the Centre, Olive will tell you a story and then ask you to tell one in return.

What a wonderful way to keep folklore from being lost.

## Who First Collected Lore?

*Minstrel* — a medieval travelling musician

*Troubadour* — a strolling minstrel

*Minnesinger* — a German travelling poet and singer

*Gleeman* — an unaccompanied singer

*Remembrancer* — someone who remembers the history of the people

*Chronicler* — a recorder of historical events, like wars and crusades

### Answers to Interesting Things about Interesting Things

1. 154.5 km (96 miles).
2. Peter Pond.
3. Sawridge.
4. Clearwater, Horse, Hangingstone and Athabasca Rivers.
5. The Lake Athabasca region was the richest fur area in the west.
6. The Mackenzie Highway.
7. Grimshaw.
8. The Whooping Crane.
9. Partly in Alberta, partly in the Northwest Territories, beginning just below the 58th parallel.
10. By boat or plane.
11. The North-West Company.
12. No.
13. Lake Athabasca.
14. Meanook.
15. No.



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